

PENNINGTON (J. R.)

Diseases of the Rectum as a Cause of Auto-  
Infection, with Report of Cases.

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BY J. R. PENNINGTON, M.D.

Professor of Diseases of the Rectum and the Principles of Gynecology  
in the Jenner Medical College; Member of the American  
Medical Association, Chicago Medical Society, etc.

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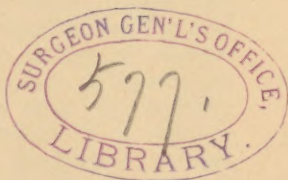
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## DISEASES OF THE RECTUM AS A CAUSE OF AUTO-INFECTION, WITH REPORT OF CASES.

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Auto-infection is not altogether a new subject, yet it has remained for modern bacteriology and chemistry to demonstrate its relation to, and importance in, the production of disease; and, today no subject commands greater interest or demands more serious thought and careful study, because when more thoroughly understood it will be found to be at the root and foundation of many of the so-called reflex and other obscure diseases. There are many sources of auto-intoxication, but this paper deals more especially with that variety of infection caused by the absorption of toxic substances generated within the alimentary canal by chemic, putrefactive or fermentative changes or bacterial development, aided and influenced by the existence of a pathologic condition of the rectum and contiguous structures.

That I may more clearly elucidate the subject, it will be necessary to call attention to the fact that the physiologic processes of the abdominal and pelvic organs, as well as those of many other organs and parts, depend in a great measure upon a healthy and non-toxic state of the sympathetic system of nerves. These organs, through this same system of nerves, are in profound and intimate relation with the rectum; and, therefore, any diseased condition of it, such as piles, fistula, ulceration, stricture, congestion, inflammation, etc., intoxicates and impairs the function of this system of nerves, and, according to that degree of intoxication and impairment, weakens the defense, modifies the nutrition and perverts the physiologic

function of the kidneys, liver, intestines, etc., which in turn favors and invites infection.

It should also be remembered that because of the peculiarity of the nerve supply to the rectum, a patient may, and often does, consider a trivial affliction of this organ as one of great magnitude, while he regards and treats a truly serious and dangerous condition as if of no vital importance whatsoever; or, perhaps, the local manifestations may be so slight that the patient has not the least suspicion of its existence. In fact I have had patients doubt my diagnosis when they were actually suffering from self-poisoning caused by a pathologic rectum, saying it was impossible, as they suffered little or no pain and their bowels were regular. Future treatment, however, convinced them of the correctness of the diagnosis, that the rectal trouble was at the foundation of their affliction. Others again have questioned my judgment when I have assured them that their rectal affliction was, comparatively, insignificant.

Bouchard tells us that "the organism in its normal, as in its pathologic, state is a receptacle and laboratory of poisons." This declaration is endorsed by our most eminent bacteriologists and chemists. And, further, recent investigations have established the fact that many of the morbid conditions from which the human race suffer have their origin or source of infection in the intestinal canal of their own systems.

The bacillus coli communis, the most prevalent bacterial germ developed in the intestinal tract, has been found in the brain, liver, lungs, kidneys and in fact in nearly every organ of the body. Its toxins are very virulent and under favorable conditions affect the vital tissues most insidiously. The watery extract of putrefying fecal matter within the intestinal canal has also been proven to be, under some circumstances, very poisonous.

Auto-infection is a very insidious disease and manifests itself in a multiplicity of ways. The following are a few of the commoner symptoms observed: head-

ache, drowsiness, lassitude, "tired feeling," loss of ambition, palpitation, impaired appetite, flatulence, indigestion, nervousness, irritability, cold hands and feet, etc. Such patients are usually inclined to be melancholic. The skin has a pale, muddy, greenish-yellow or unhealthy color, and may have the odor of foul-smelling secretions. The breath is also frequently foul. In more severe cases the symptoms are those of impending dissolution. Many of these patients travel from doctor to doctor and are usually treated for grip, malaria, biliousness, nervousness and constipation. They tell you that as long as they continue to take medicine they feel better. This improvement is oftentimes chimeric and simply serves to aid the grim monster of death in more securely and insidiously fastening his venomous fangs into the very heart of their lives. When they stop taking drugs the trouble recurs and frequently in an aggravated form. To cure these individuals it is absolutely necessary to locate and remove the cause of the infection, otherwise it is simply a waste of time, energy, life, happiness and money. Constipation, it may be said, is probably accountable for more ills than any other condition to which human flesh is heir. It is one of the most frequent causes of self-infection, yet it should be regarded as a protection against intoxication, as it presupposes that all that is absorbable has been absorbed. But are constipated people healthy? They have headache, dizziness, lassitude, etc. Hypochondriacs are usually constipated and suffer from all manner of nervous phenomena, such as perverted sensibility, tingling and "creepy" sensations, and mental disturbances. The insane very commonly suffer from constipation. So do many epileptics. I do not say that all these troubles are caused by constipation, but I do say, regardless of the cause, that they are aggravated by it and that it impairs the function of the nervous system. Another point, and one which I wish to emphasize, is that a daily evacuation of the bowels does not necessarily mean that the



individual is not constipated, neither does the absence of constipation exclude other ailments.

Were the esthetic young lady aware of the fact that in many instances her bad complexion and other ill feelings were due to the absorption into the blood of fecal matter and its deposit in her tissues and skin, we believe that she would pay more attention to the physiology and hygiene of defecation and the diseases of the rectum and intestinal tract. And further, as we become more familiar with the various poisons generated within us and their great destructive powers, their power to disorder nerve centers and paralyze the action of the vital organs, we come to realize and are forced to admit, that we are constantly standing at the very threshold of self-destruction, that we are our own murderers. In another part of this paper I called attention to the close and intimate relation existing between the rectum, pelvic, abdominal and other organs, and shall now briefly append a few cases to illustrate what serious and dangerous constitutional diseases may be, and often are, caused by rectal affections and that the relief and cure of these afflictions depend upon the administration of proper and intelligent treatment of the rectal ailments.

*Case 1.*—Mrs. S., consulted in May, 1895, in regard to an external pile. She was emaciated, nervous, had a sallow complexion, palpitation, bronchial cough, pain in the left side and back, also ovarian and uterine symptoms, had no ambition and was inclined to be melancholic; her bowels were constipated and her appetite poor. Suspecting a more serious local trouble than that of an external hemorrhoid, I explored the rectum and found an ulceration the size of a silver quarter, located two inches above the anus. This cured, her symptoms vanished and she regained her usual health.

*Case 2.*—Miss B., age 25, hysteric, nervous, emaciated, suffering from palpitation and indigestion, bowels slightly constipated, breath foul, bronchial cough and cachetic. Removed four hemorrhoids July last. She now has a beautiful rosy complexion and has gained 20 per cent. in weight.

*Case 3.*—Bright's disease(?), examination of urine of patient, upon whom I operated for fistula, showed albumin in considerable quantity. He also had slight edema of feet and ankles, waxy complexion and other symptoms indicating Bright's dis-



ease, all of which including the albumin disappeared after the operation, when he became healthy and robust.

*Case 4.*—J. B., age 43, typical case of self-infection. Hyper-trophied sphincter, greenish-yellow complexion, palpitation, dyspepsia, headache, loss of appetite, nervousness, constipation, etc. Divulsion of the sphincter and a thorough course of the waters at West Baden and French Lick Springs completely restored his health. Will say in passing that I have found the waters of these springs most admirable agents for such cases. By their laxative, diuretic and diaphoretic properties they give the system a most thorough cleansing from all impurities. They are the most potent depuratives of which I have any knowledge.

*Case 5.*—Asthma(?). Patient afflicted with hemorrhoids and ulceration. Had a chronic cough, cooing râles, tenaceous expectoration and gave a history of asthmatic attacks and evidences of auto-infection. The hemorrhoids and ulceration cured; the lungs cleared up, the cough and *asthma* (?) disappeared.

*Case 6.*—Rheumatism(?). J. S., age 42, presented evidences of chronic muscular rheumatism, for which, to use his expression, he "had taken a barrel of medicine." The rheumatism disappeared simultaneously with the cure of his rectal affliction.

*Case 7.*—Salpingitis(?). Mrs. R., with soreness in left iliac region, pressure increasing the pain, emaciated, nervous and irritable, irregular as to bowels, leucorrhœic and passing large quantities of mucus. Her physician had been treating her for inflammation of left ovary and tube. I diagnosed her condition, catarrhal inflammation of the sigmoid flexure, and by treating her accordingly the *salpingitis* (?), pain, nervousness, discharge of mucus, etc., ceased.

*Case 8.*—A. R., 53 years old, emaciated, had diarrhea and cough, and was thought to be suffering from consumption of the bowels. By relieving him of an ulceration and stricture of the rectum his diarrhea and *consumption* (?) were cured. It is needless to say that his general health materially improved.

My friend, Dr. Mathews, in his most excellent "Treatise upon the Diseases of the Rectum," reports a number of very interesting and obscure cases, many of which no doubt were suffering also from auto-infection. I herewith submit a brief abstract of one of his cases taken from the chapter on "Reflexes."

Mr. H., a prominent banker, was afflicted with a fissure of the anus. Several eminent physicians thought him afflicted with a malignant disease, which they were unable to locate, and that he was dying from its effect. Mathews also shared in this belief, saying that from his appearance and condition he thought he had a cancerous disease and that it never occurred to him that the ulceration in the rectum could bring him to such a deplorable condition; and he further says that after the

fissure was cured "in a few weeks he resumed his business at his bank, having fully recovered from his *malignant*(?) disease."

Doubtless the reflexes played an important part in this case as well as in some of the others herein reported. Yet it was undoubtedly the auto-infection from which this patient was suffering that caused these able men to err in their diagnosis and opinion.

I could cite other illustrations, but these cases speak for themselves and serve to show that no diseases more secretly impair and undermine the constitution or cause a greater degree of personal distress, or are productive of more misery and suffering or serious consequences than those occurring around the rectum and anus; and yet, notwithstanding their great importance, no class of diseases is more grievously neglected. Granting that the above were cases of auto-infection originating from disease in the rectum (and if they were not what were they?) how many more sufferers might be relieved, or even cured, by properly studying and treating pathologic conditions existing in this region?

To permit this insidious and perpetual fire of infection and disease to gradually, though slowly and surely, burn out man's existence, either by ignoring, overlooking or treating with apathy the real cause of his trouble, and constantly filling him, empirically, with drugs, when by intelligent and proper treatment this destructive flame could be so easily and completely extinguished, thereby lifting him from a pit of misery and wretchedness to that high plane of sunshine and happiness, is but little short of criminal ignorance and negligence.

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